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EAST TIMOR
TOWARDS SELF-DETERMINATION:
THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL QUESTIONS

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EAST TIMOR, PORTUGAL, AUSTRALIA AND INDONESIA: TOWARDS A MULTILATERAL CO-OPERATION

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Throughout History three countries plaid a critical role in East Timor. They are: Portugal, Australia and Indonesia.

Two others have also been very important: Japan and United States of America, as we will see below.

1. PORTUGAL

Since the beginning of the XVIth century, Portuguese navigators traders and missionaries started influencing the life of peoples in Solor, Flores, Timor and other islands in the region.

Catholic religion was introduced smoothly and peacefully in most cases. It sincretically entered the cultural universe of local kings and peoples as Islam religion did in other parts of islands now belonging to Indonesia.

Mestizos (the so-called "topazios" and catholic missionaries plaid an important role in Timor during the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries. The importance of Mestizos reduced in 1769, when the capital of Timor was transferred from Lifau to Dili.

In the beginning of the XIXth century the Portuguese armed forces in East Timor were constituted by 12 soldiers, 4 deported officers and 3 non-deported officer. By 1800 only 3 of the 50 kingdoms formally under Portuguese

sovereignty paid the Portuguese tax (finta): Hera, Laclo and Manatuto. In 1860 East Timor was divided into 11 districts and coffee, cotton, tobacco, cocoa and manioc cultivation was introduced or promoted. Governor Afonso de Castro started this way a weak Portuguese control over East Timor.

Many revolts against Portuguese control and taxation arose. They started in 1861 with Laclo and Ulmera revolts and finished only in 1913, after the end of the Third Manufahi War. Between 1913 and 1942 roads and telephone communication network were very slowly constructed. In 1940 only a few more than 1000 children went to primary school in Portuguese Timor. This represents 0,2% of the total population.

Only after the beginning of the liberation struggle in Angola in 1961 did Portugal strongly develop education in East Timor. In 1973/74 around 75% of children in school age effectively went to school.

The Portuguese democratic revolution on April 25th, 1974 put an end to Portuguese colonialism and opened the way to the creation of political parties in East Timor. Portuguese law no. 07/75 of July 1975 established the creation of a constitutional assembly of East Timor, to be elected in October 1976. Meanwhile, the colonisation program is being established and put at work. In the field of local and regional administration the first democratic elections in the district of Lautem took place and a democratically elected body was inaugurated on August 10th, 1975. In the field of education the decolonisation project was approved by the three main political parties and then by the Governor, starting then to be implemented.

Indonesian interference abruptly interrupted the decolonisation process.

As a synthesis we can say, that Portuguese colonial role did not develop East Timor nor prepare its people for self-government. The decolonisation process started too late and when Portugal was too tired due to colonial war in its three main colonies and had not enough strength to keep peaceful conditions that would be necessary for a real process of self-determination.

2. AUSTRALIA

In December 1941 Australian and Dutch forces invaded Portuguese Timor. There were no killings during this invasion, but doing so the Australian Government displaced a conflict with Japan from Australia to East Timor. As a consequence, Portuguese Timor was invaded and occupied by Japanese forces from February 1942 to September 1945. Many thousands of Timorese paid with their lives the support they gave to Australian commandos in their struggle against Japanese occupiers. At the end of the 2nd World War more than 60 thousand Timorese had lost their lives. This represents around 13% of its population and can be compared with 14% losses in Soviet Union during World War II. In this same war Australia lost around 21 thousand lives. It was a belligerent nation, while Portugal was a neutral one and supposed to be

respected as such by all belligerents, Japan and Australia included, as it happened with Macao.

As a matter of fact the killing of Timorese was done by Japanese occupiers or their collaborators, and not by Australian commandos. But the fact that Australian forces have invaded Portuguese Timor was reason enough for Imperial Japan to invade this neutral territory. The support that, although invaded by Australia, Timorese and even Portuguese gave to Australian commandos, in the common struggle against Japanese occupation, resulted in extensive killing of East Timorese. This support prevented the Japanese to invade Australia. Indirectly the inhabitants of neutral Portuguese Timor suffered starvation and extensive killing, of which Australians were the beneficiaries.

In 1975 the Australian Government supported in fact the invasion of East Timor. Not only did it hide the murder of 5 journalists by Indonesian forces in a preliminary attempt for invasion, but also gave political and diplomatic support to the occupation itself. Out of geo-strategical and diplomatic reasons for that attitude, the Australian Ambassador in Jakarta reminded his Government by means of a cable dated August 17th, 1975:

"*I wonder whether the (Australian) Government is aware of the interest, which the Ministry of the Minerals and Energy has in the Timor situation. It seems to me that this department might well have an interest in feeling the gap in the agreement on maritime borders and this would be more easily negotiable with Indonesia by closing the present, then with Portugal or independent Portuguese Timor*".

Australian Government was the first and only one formally recognising the integration of East Timor in Indonesia.

3. INDONESIA

As a consequence of Indonesian invasion and occupation more than one third of the total population existing in 1975 perished. The number of schools increased and now almost the whole of Timorese population speaks *bahasa indonesia*. The number of graduates, most of them formed in Indonesian Universities dramatically increased, but Timorese people suffered genocide and terror under Suharto dictatorship.

In January 1999 President Habibie opened the way for the independence of East Timor, if this is the will of the Timorese people. The Australian and American Governments had a say in this positive change.

In fact, looking at the diplomatic, political and military support that United States of America, Australia, Great Britain, Germany, France, Japan, as well as other countries, gave to the occupation of East Timor, we can ask if the invasion of East Timor was in fact an Indonesian invasion. The soldiers were Indonesian, but arms, political and diplomatic support were Australian, American, British,

Japanese and in general, according to the interest of the so-called free world, in a critical period of the cold war.

Anyway this tragedy had as main actors Timorese and Indonesian people, who suffered under the same dictatorial regime, that ended on May 21st, 1998, when Suharto resigned. But until now the oppression and terror did not stop to be exercised by the Indonesian Army and by its "militias" extension.

4. HISTORICAL RESPONSIBILITIES MUST BE ASSUMED POSITIVELY THROUGH MULTI-LATERAL CO-OPERATION AND FRIENDSHIP

The history of East Timorese established a strong link between Portugal, Australia and Indonesia. It would be completely unuseful to debate, which country has stronger responsibilities in the suffering of East Timorese people. It would still be worse, if each one of those countries would try to hide its own responsibility, by blaming others.

Instead of that and taking into account that all of those free countries have a moral duty towards Timorese people the best thing we have to do is to join hands and provide co-operation, in order to fulfil the goals that Timorese people will freely and democratically choose for their country.

This has always been my concern, even during the worst years of occupation. This was my concern too, when East Timorese suffered under colonial rule of Portuguese dictatorship of Salazar and Caetano, against which I have been struggling since my youth.

The participation of several Indonesian democrats in almost all the symposia and international conferences I have organised as Co-ordinator of the "Jornadas de Timor" of the Oporto University is just a sign of this concern.

The support given by the Oporto University to the organisation of international conferences on East Timor, that took place in Australia, in 1995, and the organisation, together with three Australian Universities, of a big conference in Sydney in June 1996 is another sign. The strong participation, not only of East Timorese coming from inside, but also of Indonesian, Australian and Portuguese academics, students and politicians, was a first step for this multilateral co-operation.

At the end of this big conference, that took place at the University of Technology of Sydney, I also stated to Australian academics, who participated in its organisation, that never again would I organise a conference with the same goals. I previewed the situation would change in the next few years. Therefore, what I meant was, that I would be very happy if I could participate in a conference aimed to prepare a plan for the reconstruction of East Timor and for its development in a free and democratic framework.

I hope that this conference will be a first step in this direction. So, I ask Timorese, Australian and Indonesian friends how to establish one or more institutions and co-operation agreements, bearing in mind this particular goal.

I believe, that to look into history of East Timor, Indonesia and the region in a multifaceted way can help to overcome prejudice and establish good basis for a fair and deep relationship. Bearing this in mind, I intend to launch, in the near future, an international and multifaceted course on *East Timor, Indonesia and International Context: History and Perceptions*. In this course Timorese, Indonesian, Australian, Dutch and Portuguese teachers, along with teachers from other countries, will present their different perceptions on history to students from the various countries. The dialogue between those teachers and students having religious, cultural and political different background can improve the understanding of people in respect for their differences.

Another project I have in mind is to launch a bulletin, to promote reflection and debate on democracy and development between East Timorese, Indonesians, Australians and Portuguese. This is supposed to circulate through e-mail and to be published in four languages: Portuguese, English, Tetum and Bahasa Indonesia. Monthly tele- or videoconferences and yearly conferences will be part of the project. Political, educational, economical, health, environmental, gender and other issues will be raised and discussed. Each one can learn from the experience of others. Understanding and friendly co-operation so developed can help the establishment of peace and good relationship in the region, the consolidation of democracy and self-sustained and global development.

This is my proposal and my hope...

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